

3-1-1998

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Recommended Citation

Villani, Luisa (1998) "The Station at Dontesk, Sometimes Called "Don't Ask"," *Yalobusha Review*: Vol. 4 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol4/iss1/30>

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Luisa Villani

The Station at Donetsk, Sometimes Called "Don't Ask"

Stillness at the heart
and yellow rays all around,
not your typical existentialist poem
but something trembling on the edge
of a table. Hear the undertow
of a passing train. I detest messy afternoons
but sometimes the fruit does speak
before it falls. Then the world rises,
the whole hulking machinery of the day,
a low grumble in the throat.
What to say? In the crowded dissolution of dialects,
the passing inflection of seconds,
what could stop a woman
from falling off a platform
like so much cut lumber? Not that I
thought about it. Not exactly.
I tell you even when poems come upon me
I'm usually doing something else.
And I have no concept of time
except to know that it passes. This
was not my appointed train, not my
country, not my job.
Exposed to all that nothingness
when she gave way in front of me
I did what I've always done
in the face of every nightmare
I've ever known. I reached for cover
and pulled, as if one mighty tug
could muster all of safety's
safety around me. Like a banana
putting back on its peel. Like a book

closing its cover. No words
passed between us as she half-turned,
my fist still gripping the waist-belt
of her coat. No words as the light diffused
through her yellow scarf
and train doors appeared behind her,
open, waiting. *Nyecht*,
just her eyes half-closed
as if any end to fatigue
was a fitting end, then she sank
into a tide of passengers.
I backed away, set adrift,
loosed from context
and I'm still floating. My face
in the bathroom mirror
just now seemed detached, unfamiliar
like a photo not quite developed
wavering in a tray. I tell you
these lips that don't work
are not mine, nor these caged teeth.
These eyes belong to someone else,
someone swimming far above me.
My clothes are weighted,
unwieldy, my arms, useless for hours
which I recollect to have been three.
Every quarter turn of the sun's rays
a train shakes the surface
of the street. Twelve now. An even
dozen. Someone should grab
my shoulders and say, *Yes, yes, alive!*—
but there's no one here
only the watcher watching
as the groceries reverberate
on the table,
and the yellow tomatoes
occasionally fall.